

**United States Environmental Protection Agency  
Criminal Investigation Division  
Investigative Activity Report**

**Case Number**

1000-M467

**Case Title:**

Perma-Fix Northwest, Inc. (PFNW)

**Reporting Office:**

Seattle, WA, Area Office

**Subject of Report:**

20130319 Meeting with Washington State Department of Ecology personnel.

**Activity Date:**

March 19, 2013

**Reporting Official and Date:**

[REDACTED]

Special Agent

03-MAY-2013, Signed by [REDACTED]

**Approving Official and Date:**

[REDACTED]

Special Agent in Charge

03-MAY-2013 [REDACTED]

**SYNOPSIS**

On March 19, 2013, SA [REDACTED] and SA [REDACTED] interviewed Jerry French, Joannette Biebesheimer and Kerry Graber of the Washington State Department of Ecology regarding the activities of Perma-Fix Northwest, located in Richland, Washington.

**DETAILS**

On March 19, 2013, SA [REDACTED] and I interviewed Jerry French, Joannette Biebesheimer and Kerry Graber of the Washington State Department of Ecology regarding the activities of Perma-Fix Northwest, located in Richland, Washington. Once advised of the identities of the interviewing agents and the nature of the interview, the Washington State employees, provided the following information:

The Washington State Department of Ecology (WA DOE) has been looking into some potential violations of permits by both the contractor CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company (CHPRC) and Perma-Fix Northwest (PFNW) regarding activities involving the Hanford Nuclear site. According to interviews, inspections and documents reviewed they believe that CHPRC sent PFNW a series of drums which were improperly labeled as "debris", PFNW accepted and treated the drums all in violation of PFNW permits.

According to their research, CHPRC is removing drums and waste from a series of burial sites located on the Hanford Nuclear site. These drums are not properly identified at the removal site, labeled as debris and sent to PFNW for identification and treatment.

When CHPRC identifies the product as debris, the company is not required to send it to a union run shop known as the Waste Receiving and Processing Facility (WRAP) at the Hanford site, therefore saving money. CHPRC is required by permit to properly identify the substance within the drums prior to it leaving the site. WA DOE believes that these misidentified drums are being sent to PFNW for treatment. Once the drums or containers are at PFNW, they are opened, identified and treated at the site. Once the treatment is completed, the waste is then returned to Hanford for storage until Hanford is allowed to send the treated material to the Waste Isolation Pilot Program (WIPP) for eventual disposal on the Hanford site. The WIPP area of Hanford is not allowed to take in certain types of materials including reactive hazardous waste.

In June of 2006, a Hanford contractor removes a buried steel drum from 218-4C Trench 4 which is identified as drum #0031161. This drum is stored at the Hanford Central Waste Complex (CWC0

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from June of 2006 through 2008. In 2008, the drum is moved to the WRAP area of Hanford for processing; it is x-rayed and found to not contain debris. The contents of the drum were not reclassified.

On February 9, 2011, #0031161 was emptied onto a WRAP glove box sorting table. This is used to identify the contents. The contents consist of "wet sand" and other moisture in the drum. The drum has baking soda added for neutralization and then repacked into two separate drums.

On April 26, 2011, a Nuclear Chemical Operator (NCO) notices a liquid leaking onto the floor coming from drum #0062288. This is one of the two drums repacked from #0031161. The leak from the drum caused significant damage to the facility and an evacuation of the personnel. An assessment of the area in which the drum leaked is found to be highly radioactive and is now designated as a Radiation Control Area (RAC), causing the building to be shutdown for four weeks. On May 24, 2011, a WA DOE contractor provides a Drum Incompatibility Evaluation (DIE) and reports that drum #0062288 contains plutonium 239, 240, 241 and americium 241 among other materials. This report also states that #0062288's original content report from 1978 is different than its current designations.

On March 22, 2012, this drum, along with two others, is sent to PFNW for identification and treatment for eventual return to the WIPP. #0062288 is opened at PFNW in a Double Containment Unit (DCU) and the liquid material is poured into 1,000ml plastic jars. A "lime slurry" is placed into the materials for neutralization and left to "air out" on the floor of the DCU for between five and six days. According to PFNW personnel when it was discovered that there was plutonium nitrate contained within, CHPRC ordered the company to air out the contents. PFNW is not allowed to air out plutonium nitrate as HEPA filters for the air will not be able to separate out gamma radiation.

During an inspection by WA DOE on April 19, 2012, it is learned that the lime slurry did not work as expected and caused a significant problem within the DCU. During the inspection, WA DOE personnel were shown photos of the waste airing out and were told that the company takes both videos and photos of shipments received from Hanford. A section of the floor was required to be removed because of the release of acids and radiation into the DCU.

WA DOE personnel spoke with Washington State Department of Health (WA DOH) and WA DOH confirmed that it was contacted by PFNW about the release and contamination.

On May 23, 2012, Graber had a brief phone conversation with [REDACTED] of PFNW in which [REDACTED] denied any floor damage as a result of the opening of drum #0062288. On June 7, 2012, [REDACTED] answered a Graber email with an electronic version for questions Graber had posed in her previous email. Inside of this package of answers, PFNW denies that there were any photos of the drum #0062288 drying out or that the drum caused the floor damage. She felt that [REDACTED] was evasive and possibly deceptive during this earlier phone conversation [REDACTED] left the company in August of 2012.

On July 30, 2012, Ron Skinnerland of WA DOE received a letter from [REDACTED], [REDACTED] of PFNW regarding the alleged spill and concrete removal. In his letter, Grondin denied any spills or any other problems with the treatment of drum #0062288.

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